

Consolidation Task Force Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind

October 2, 2003

Virginia School for the Deaf, Blind and Multi-Disabled
Hampton

Present: Nancy Armstrong, Mary-Margaret Cash, Doug Cox (for Jo Lynne DeMary), Scott Goodman (Chair), Emmett Hanger, Jr., Ronald Lanier, Henry Maxwell, Glen Slonneger, Lisa Surber, Darlene White, and David Young. DOE Staff: Karen Trump. Facilitator: Judy Burtner. Recorder: Kathryn Burruss.

Statement of Purpose

Develop a plan of implementation for consolidating services for the deaf and/or blind and multi-disabled students served by Virginia's two schools for these students.

Session Objectives

1. Receive public comment
2. Receive and discuss requested information
3. Select an option among the three remaining options
4. Develop the types of information to be included in report per the report requirements
5. Make a decision on the need for the October 7 planning session (and develop an agenda if there is a need)

Tour of Facilities

A tour of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind and Multi-disabled preceded the beginning of the Task Force meeting.

Public Comment

The following individuals spoke during the public comment period:

Sonya Karber, Pat Brown, Mike Haywood, Joyce Green, Latonya Winnegan, Mark Cooper, Lorine Peterson, Antonio Skinner, Jamie Chapman, Amy Behr, and Kim Harvey.

Operating Procedures

Judy Burtner reviewed the operating procedures relative to decision-making and the handling of differences in viewpoint that had been agreed to at the June 3-4 session. These included:

- A quorum for decision-making is 7 present members
- Modified consensus – tool for decision-making

- In event, a decision cannot be made by consensus; gradients of agreement (GOA) tool will be used
- In event, a decision cannot be made by GOA, decision will be made by voting with 75% of those present voting in the affirmative
- Any decisions made will stand regardless of whether all Task Force members are present

Impressions of Staunton and Hampton Schools

Having toured both schools and received information relative to both schools at previous meetings, members shared their impressions of the schools, students, enrollment, facilities, surrounding communities, staffing, programs, transportation, and funding:

Students

- Students are happy, learning, with hands-on experiences, and appear to have good student/staff relationships
- Hampton student require a higher student-teacher/staff ratio
- Hampton students do not appear to be as multi-disabled/lower functioning as previously thought – comment from the Hampton Superintendent that one must look at the student records to see the real picture – not all disabilities are visually apparent
- Staunton currently does not serve multi-disabled students
- What are the expected outcomes and where do students go when they have completed the VSDB program?

Enrollment

- Staunton - 159 student enrollment (29 from the infant program) – this is a 5-year high
- Hampton – 88 student enrollment. There were 52 inquires for enrollment last year; the Hampton Superintendent believes that fear of the school closing has previously hurt enrollment but that enrollment has been stable for the last 3 years

Facilities and Terrain

- The Hampton campus is easier to maintain with regard to painting so more money can be spent on children
- Terrain at Staunton presents a barrier for students with mobility impairments
- Hampton can increase the number of buildings on the grounds
- Both campuses have acreage that is not developed
- State-of-the-art school should reflect low-cost building and maintenance
- Both campuses have a number of buildings that are not being used for educational purposes and are leased by other entities
- If consolidation occurs at either site, current leases would need to be re-evaluated with regard to being continued .

- As currently exists, Staunton could absorb the students from the two schools temporarily while Hampton would not have the appropriate dorm space.
- The Superintendent believes that Hampton would require minimal renovations to house all students in a consolidated model.

Surrounding Communities

- Both communities are supportive of the schools and allow off-campus jobs and activities
- There are no problems known to the Task Force with surrounding community and its environment in either community

Staffing

- Ratio standard is 8 – 10 students per staff person and 6 per staff for multi-disabled populations
- The Staunton program has more deaf teachers on staff
- For both schools, and particularly for Hampton, the every 3 or 4 year discussion of consolidation hurts recruitment and retention of staff
- The VSDBs are 24-hour facilities needing 3 shifts of personnel. The Hampton overnight program has more shift staff because of the supervision needs of the multi-disabled population
- Security is easily maintained at Hampton because its terrain facilitates visual monitoring
- Hampton is located close to one of the best medical facilities and a fire department is just around the corner (discussion of Staunton medical facilities not conducted)
- Hampton police department does extra patrols around the Hampton facility
- Staunton is also a safe campus also with procedures in place to assure the safety of all students and staff

Programs

- Multi-disabled at Hampton
- Impressive vocational program at Hampton with approximately 43 students going off campus for jobs – employment opportunities in Hampton are available
- Reference to “No Child Left Behind” requirements was brought up again with the assurance that the department will address that for the two schools as required and that this is not a matter for the Task Force to deliberate
- Differentiation of programs – 1) the lower academic student should be in functional academic and vocational program and 2) the academic students should be in a program leading to standard diplomas
- Hampton has a larger number of students being transitioned to the workplace

Transportation

- Both schools do not serve students on Friday because they go home for the weekend, returning to the school on Sunday

Funding

- Both Superintendents believe that the schools have had to reduce needed services because of state budget cuts

Sharing of Requested Information

Karen Trump provided the Task Force with additional information that had been requested at earlier meetings. This information included:

- Public comment (from the DOE mailbox and other sources)
- Results of the ADA Survey (closed buildings were not included)
- Results of the special education administrators interviews
- Summaries of the campus building conditions
- Possible scenarios of the remaining three options
- Possible sites for a new school

Written documents and PowerPoint presentations were used to review the information.

Option Discussion

The Task Force spent a considerable amount of time discussing the three options and what will best meet the needs of the children and families. The characteristics of the “best interest of the child” that had been discussed at a previous meeting were reviewed. A description of “consolidation of services,” discussed at a previous meeting was also reviewed. The discussion focused on the following points:

- The Task Force has been charged with making a decision/recommendation to the Governor and the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Education Committees and the Senate Finance and Education Committees by December 1.
- The opportunity to make a decision is a historical one given the number of years the issue has been considered.
- A “state-of- the-art” or new school can focus on the programmatic needs of the students such as looping systems, appropriate acoustics and lighting, adequate space, technology, and other infrastructure supports. It was stated that the education building should be designed around the programming and not the other way around.
- The historical value of both sites cannot be easily dismissed. It was mentioned in reaction to the comments regarding the historical value of the campuses that the Task Force was in the position to make history again by making a very difficult decision in order to assure an appropriate future for the students. This

may include consideration for a new facility that is located at one of the existing sites or a new site.

- The issue of politics has been an issue relative to past studies and may be an issue relative to the recommendations from this work.
- Each site has re-sale value. Each is located in a prime area for development and interest has been expressed for purchase of at least one of the properties (Hampton).
- If both sites are left open, then implementation that started in the 1990's relative to separate missions/programs for both schools should be completed.

Sharing of Preferences

Members were asked to state their support of each option. Each member (11 in attendance) shared their preference for each of the three options as a means to determine the current preference for the remaining options. The results were as follows:

| Yes | No | Option |
|------------|-----------|--|
| 6 | 5 | Leave both schools open but with changes that may include downsizing, opening space for other entities, upgrading for certain other groups of students, etc. |
| 4 | 7 | Consolidate to one of the current facilities |
| 6 | 5 | Close both schools and relocate to another location |

Next Steps

It did not appear that consensus could be reached in the remaining time. Because there was not a clear preference among the options from the activity, members asked DOE staff to flush out the implementation costs of each of the three remaining options and to begin a draft report to the Governor. Information is to be sent to the members prior to the next meeting. The information is to include the pros and cons of each of the options.

It was agreed that the public hearings scheduled for October 14 and 16 in Roanoke and Williamsburg be canceled on an 8-3 vote. It was felt that the Task Force needed more meetings to finalize the selection of an option and that the Focus Groups and opportunities for Public Comment had been sufficient for input to the Task Force.

Nancy Armstrong and Darlene White agreed to get key members of their staff together to prepare a document on how services could be consolidated should both schools remain open under option #1. They will share their proposal at the next meeting.

Next Meeting

It was agreed that the October 7 meeting would be canceled with the Task Force meeting October 30, 9:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m., Department of Rehabilitative Services, Richmond. The agenda will include the following:

- The proposal from N. Armstrong and D. White regarding consolidation of services at both schools should they remain open

- Information from DOE relative to the three options
- An effort to make a decision among the three options

Prepared by Kathryn Burruss and Judy Burtner
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